

## SPOR

Various Venues, Aarhus, Denmark

SPOR bills itself as a festival for Music and Sound Art, but this year's edition is as much about performance as sound: everything from costumes to movement to high-tech kit is fair game. Over the weekend, artists perform with props including bubble guns, robots, toothbrushes, a wok, a blow-up sex doll and squeeze bottles of blue Gatorade. If that makes it sound like the organisers raided an improv comedy club, don't be fooled: SPOR's programme takes risks that balance any wackiness with a good deal of thought.

Opening the festival is *Euridike? Vol 1*, a dark performance by dancer Kassandra Wedel, violinist Emily Yabe and guitarist Mia Carla Oehring that shifts between movements suggesting extreme pain and potential hope, on a floor covered with projections of news stories and film clips that would do a number on anyone's mental health. From there, it's a walk across town to a gallery in an industrial shed that Ryoko Akama has kitted out with robots made from everyday objects, for her *Composition Of Happiness*. She scampers about, turning her motorised creations on – while the four members of composer collective Bastard Assignments perform awkward everyday tasks, including wheezing into a harmonica, zipping and unzipping a change purse, and brushing their teeth so that the paste foams and drips out the floor.

The following day's events take a more cerebral turn with the minimalist vocal piece for four singers, Louise Vind Nilsen's *Human Metronome*. Each singer repeats one syllable, sometimes

changing the volume. It feels like listening to radar swoops of celestial objects looping out of phase with each other, and predicting each singer's changes becomes increasingly interesting as the piece progresses. This is followed by the gorgeous *No Tomorrow* – a 'guitar ballet' played by six young women dressed in plain jeans and white T-shirts, singing, strumming acoustic guitar and dancing in and out of formation. The music is by Bryce Dessner of The National, a frequent collaborator of artist Ragnar Kjartansson, whose obsessions with nostalgia and coming of age can be felt here. There is a *Virgin Suicides* wistfulness to the styling, but the slowness and sweetness of the piece saves it from death cult creepiness: the choreography has more in common with Michael Clark Company's spare movements set to Erik Satie's *Ogives*, and shares a similar joy.

Bastard Assignments are up next with a suite of four pieces, ranging from a vocal piece that uses only sound and gesture to tell a comedy monologue (*dot drip line line 8918: EDGE* by Caitlin Rowley) to *Feed*, a weird and paranoid stoner-ish take on *An American Werewolf In London*. But the standout is *Impossible Penetrations*, a collaboration with vocalist and composer Marcella Lucatelli. It's polymorphously perverse, a little scary, tender and very gross, involving fiddling with beads on sticks, jumping through hula hoops, and genderfuck costumes. Lucatelli's breathless chorus of "*Happy, happy, happy Bad Things!*" reaches a frenzy of helium menace as the four Bastard Assignments performers dance, uncomfortably linked within the hoops. The music is punctuated by one sided mobile phone calls and a

scene resembling a cuddle puddle. At the end, the four performers fill their mouths with condiments – mustard, ketchup, Gatorade and squeeze mayonnaise – and I feel the urge to puke. Job well done.

I end the day at Lynfabrikken, set up like an opera performer's living room for the claustrophobic *Up Close And Personal*. A bathrobed Daniel Gloger introduces himself and begins a monologue about his career, as if for a magazine profile. But scenes and his character shift in an increasing cascade of flashing lights, Solfeggio tones and even the twee ukulele music of YouTube adverts as this actor reveals he is well and truly cracked.

On the closing day, the performances are more elegant but sometimes too clever for their own good. Such is the case with *The Curtain*, a combination of lap steel, piano and violin with a tape loop bow – and some rotating film projections meant to connect this to the life of Edgar Allan Poe. It feels effects heavy and overdetermined. In the other side of that venue (a small theatre) though, Christian Windfield performs the mesmerising *Lykkebaken*, a sound piece where he transforms a standard wok filled with water into a magical cauldron, using only foil, lights, bows, whisks and a metal gong-scraping tool to create drone and gamelan-like vibrations, and to coax droplets of water out of the bowl like sparks of fire.

In a programme about collaborations between music and science, Ezko Kikoutchi hooks a woman to a brainwave sensing helmet in *D'Hypnose*, and projects the lit-up areas onto a screen so performers can improvise to the patterns and create a feedback loop. It's nothing new, though – David Rosenboom was

doing similar stuff with *Brainwave Music* (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) in the 1970s. It's not entirely convincing either – it's not clear whether the sensors are working or the projection was prerecorded until the woman stands and her onscreen brain floods with colour. But "*c2b7*" by Chloé Bieri, later in the set, combines four chess players' moves with triggers for four different types of film music. Forfeit gestures include bubble gun shots, tossed confetti and lit sparklers, and the piece degenerates into witty and refreshing chaos.

Lucatelli reappears to perform *Run Run Run*, where she performs extended vocal technique takes on 12 characters including a Jagger-esque rock star, a *Rambo*-style action hero complete with a fake muscle shirt, groupies, starlets, ventriloquists (with that aforementioned sex doll as dummy) and ranting older ladies. As she changes outfits between acts, a pop song with the lyrics "*Run Run Run*" in the chorus plays. Her act is part Cindy Sherman, part Natasha Lyonne in *Russian Doll* in need of an exorcism – there are corpse growls and actual foaming at the mouth. It would be brilliant if it were half as long; billed at 40 minutes, it lasts at least twice that, and the audience is restless and talkative when headliner Kaada appears to perform a set of cinematic keyboard compositions on a horseshoe-shaped keyboard array. He dashes between them, playing a warm Rhodes piano that evokes Penguin Cafe Orchestra, and several other keyboards and pads trigger the sweep of Jean-Michel Jarre by way of early Warp records. Epic themes to end a bold festival. Emily Bick



Bryce Dessner, *No Tomorrow*